

Command Color Guard Seeks A Few Good Members

Press Release

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Though each wears the uniform of a different military service, they are a team in every sense of the word. They are the North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command Joint Color Guard and they are looking for a few good men and women to join them.

The color guard supports military retirements, memorial services, parades and other official functions but not funerals as do honor guard units, said Marine Corps Sgt. Gabriel Romero, the joint color guard's commander. The unit also supports civilian events, such as the annual Pikes Peak or Bust Rodeo. The color guard posted the U.S., Canadian and command flags at the start of the event Aug. 13, which was designated NORAD and USNORTHCOM night.



NORAD and USNORTHCOM
Color Guard

Photo credit: Petty Officer 1st
Class Shane Wallenda, USN

We could use a couple more members, Romero said. There are four veteran members and a new recruit, Air Force Staff Sgt. Vanessa Soto, who made her public debut at the rodeo carrying the USNORTHCOM flag.

Currently, the color guard receives more invitations from civilian groups in the area than it can accept. Ideally, Romero said, the group wants to recruit enough new people to set up a performance roster.

While there are other honor guard units in the area, the NORAD and USNORTHCOM color guard is the only one representing the four military branches and the Canadian Forces.

They are in high demand. People know they are here and want them, said Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. D. Scott Frye, who is sergeant major for the commands as well as color guard advisor. Frye said the color guard enjoys performing so much, members were supporting functions at their own expense. Frye said part of his job is preventing that from happening.

I'm here to ensure they don't pay for transportation, food, or uniform items when they perform, said Frye.

But even if the unit did continue paying its own way members said they would gladly do so.

We like what we're doing, explained Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Bernard Whitney, the color guard's noncommissioned officer in charge. We do this because we want to honor the flag, but we also like the camaraderie in the group, he said.

Air Force Senior Airman Mike Kakarian said he also likes the feeling I get at the end of a ceremony, when audiences clap and tell us how much they appreciate us.

And once, added Whitney, we got to meet the (Denver) Broncos cheerleaders after performing at the Air Force Academy. And then there's the free food, Whitney said, ticking off an imaginary list of perks color guard members receive.

Though the unit is young it did not exist before the command stood up two years ago members have about 10 years of cumulative experience, which may be another reason they work together so well.

Military custom and courtesies are pretty much the same in all of the services so it wasn't hard learning to drill together, said Romero. Before the assignment to Peterson AFB, Romero spent two years in the Marine Corps Security Force Battalion color guard at Norfolk, Va. As the group's commander, Romero gives commands during drills and ceremonies and stands in fourth formation carrying an M-16 rifle.

Army Spc. Michael Hall, who is 6-foot-2 without his Army boots, joined his first color guard unit while assigned

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to Kaiserslautern, Germany, which also is where he spent his first duty assignment. Hall said that because of his height, he usually is in the center of formation carrying the U.S. or Army flag.

Whitney is a veteran of command's color guard as he has been with the group since its inception. Previously Whitney was a member of the U.S. Space Command honor guard. He said he gained his color guard experience while assigned to the USS Kentucky (SSBN-737) four years ago. The yeoman, who also carries an M-16 rifle, stands first in line when the formation posts the colors.

Unlike the others, Kakarian had no previous color guard experience. But, he said, "I had been in my high school's band so I was used to marching in large formations." Kakarian, who stands second in formation carrying the state flag, was at the Cheyenne Mountain Operations Center until his reassignment to Peterson AFB.

Soto, the new recruit, is not sure yet which position she will occupy on a regular basis. She is, however, elated to again be part of a color guard unit. "I get a sense of honor and pride when we perform," said the Pueblo, Colo., native.

Soto also had been assigned to U.S. Space Command before the move to USNORTHCOM a year ago. She said she gained honor guard experience at Kirkland AFB, N.M., which was her first duty station.

Anyone interested in joining the command's color guard should contact Romero at 554-5931 or Whitney at 552-2075.